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ABSTRACT

Due to the increase in the number of institutions asking for donations from businesses and individuals, community colleges seeking to raise funds must be responsive to the needs of their local business communities. In conducting major fundraising campaigns, its is important that potential donors believe that the need is crucial and have the capability to give, that a group of capable volunteers exist who can solicit contributions; and that colleges have a clear campaign. Seven steps for successful fundraising include: enlist the support of top community leaders; conduct extensive research on financial capabilities in the community; cultivate the interest and involvement of top leaders and potential donors; develop a plan; develop fundraising appeals; develop a positive image among potential donors; and ensure input by college faculty, staff, and students. Although college presidents and trustees can hire development directors to generate major funding, they also have important roles to play in providing a guiding vision for the college and department; identifying and explaining private funding needs; setting realistic goals for fundraising; providing the budget and other resources needed to reach goals; setting a positive, visible image in the community by being active; cultivating strong, positive, personal relationships with top donors and prospects; taking an active role in requesting major gifts; and personally providing recognition to major donors. (HAA)

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Fund Raising in a Changing Economy

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Network of California Community College Foundations

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FOUNDATION DEVELOPMENT Abstracts

FUND RAISING IN A CHANGING ECONOMY: NOTES FOR PRESIDENTS AND TRUSTEES

Glenn L. Essex and Charles Ansbach

Despite California's current recession, people are still signing big checks for good projects. The challenge now is that donors are a lot more picky about what they support. Everyone is asking for money so the pressure is on to make sure that your project is appealing to your donors, that all of the information needed to explain it has been gathered, and that other methods of funding have been exhausted.

Education is still a top priority among many donors and volunteers. Community colleges have a chance to get more support than they have ever received in the past because they can be more responsive than many other schools in meeting the real needs of their local business communities. It will not be easy, but with a well organized, on-going fund-raising program that has a clear sense of vision, the involvement of top college trustees, administrators and faculty and the necessary funds to maintain a consistent effort. It can be done.

Success generally begins with a compelling vision for where a college is going, which provides the context for new projects. Among the key roles the president of a college can play is to provide that sense of vision, to get personally involved in soliciting select major donors and to provide the funds needed to support an effective fund-raising program. These are some of the most vital aspects of a successful community college fund-raising effort.

THE BASICS OF FUND RAISING REMAIN CONSTANT

Time-tested fund-raising principles for conducting major campaigns have not changed. They are:

1 The leadership of the college and its potential donors must believe that the need for which funds are to be sought is crucial and that the college's plan to meet that need is correct and compelling.

2 The potential donors must have the capability to give the size and number of gifts needed to reach the specified fund-raising goal.

3 There must be a dedicated group of capable volunteers who are able and willing to lead, as well as solicit contributions at the levels required.

4 There should be a clear campaign plan with goals, timetable and an organizational structure managed by competent staff to assure the best possibility of success.

SEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESS

When you begin to plan what your college can do to meet perceived need, you should **get top community leaders** to help you. People who are involved in your planning and who agree with your solutions are more likely to give donations to help bring those plans to fruition. For example, one California college is setting up a waste management program that major local corporations need. Those companies are giving major gifts and volunteer time to help complete the project.

Do extensive research into who in your community has the financial capability, as well as possible interest, to support some aspect of your college. Look beyond the obvious. In a recent campaign to fund a major library, the list of possible donors included all of the "usual" names of affluent local people who gave to most big projects. After closer inspection of the list, a new name emerged. It was a woman who had never given to anything before. She had great wealth and her late husband had loved books above all else. After several private meetings and the offer to name a major part of the library in her husband's name, the gift was made and so was the campaign.

Cultivate the interest and involvement of top leaders and potential donors. Private tours of a new facility on campus, special opportunities to meet with the president or dean for insightful information on important topics affecting the college and/or the community and personalized recognition for any gift of time and resources are just a few ways to carry out this important work—before asking for any gift at all.

Develop a plan long before conducting a specific campaign. What do you want to accomplish this year? In three years? It generally takes a new fund-raising program three years to break even and generate contributions in significant excess of the costs. Planned giving yields the most in total giving, but it takes a long time to get each gift. Direct mail requires the consistent sending of appeals throughout the year, every year. The return on the initial mailing is often barely at break even and results are built gradually. Special events are good for publicity and identifying new potential supporters, but they require comparatively excessive amounts of volunteer and staff time to produce when fund-raising is the goal.

Develop appeals. They can be very effective in raising funds and identifying new donors. Again, consistency in conducting the appeal and framing the reason for giving is impor-

tant. Major gift campaigns where volunteers ask for contributions face-to-face with potential donors are the most effective and efficient way to get large donations. Careful selection of the project, the prospect, the requested gift level and the volunteer is paramount. Capital campaigns for major buildings, programs or endowments are the biggest fund-raising projects a college can undertake. The success of these campaigns is built on the prior success of the other fund-raising efforts, which help to build the necessary donor and volunteer base.

A positive image among potential donors. This step is increasingly important in this time when the competition for donor support is high. Regular announcements of newsworthy events and people connected with your college is helpful, but the greatest impact will come from selectively targeting top leaders in the community for special briefings, discussions, events and meetings.

Lastly, **don't forget about your faculty, staff and students**. Seek out faculty input on possible projects to use as a focus in fund-raising. However, some faculty members may want to have their particular project among donors. One solution is to give those faculty responsibility for identifying and cultivating initial donor interest before using the resources of the college to solicit major support. Always let your faculty know about all your fund-raising successes and look for ways to give them direct benefits from those efforts.

Similarly, keep your administration and service staff informed about major gifts to the college, so when it comes time to ask them for support they will be more willing to do so. Involve students in select phonothons, special events and other fund-raising activities. Keep them informed about select major gifts received. Begin building a tradition with your current and future alumni in all aspects of giving.

WHAT CAN A PRESIDENT OR TRUSTEE DO?

One fund-raising strategy used by some college presidents or trustees has been to hire experienced development directors and give them a directive to quickly put a strong program in place and to report back when the job is done. Unfortunately, it rarely works.

In a brief survey of community college development directors, one consistent comment was how difficult raising money was when the president or trustee was not involved in planning, being visible in the community, cultivating relationships with top donors or taking part in top level solicitations. Another repeated comment was on the difficulty of trying to produce major results with minor budgets.

Development directors can and should be expected to generate major donor funding for their college or school. They should be part of setting the goals and budgets for their operations. They should be effective in identifying donor and volunteer prospects, training volunteers, planning and managing events and mailings, maintaining donor records, developing suggestions for recognitions and maintaining communications with donors over time. They should help identify and clarify those aspects of campus programs that will be the most appealing to donors and packaging those appeals with input from all concerned. Development directors should be able to show progress in not only the amounts raised, but also the levels to which they are helping to move donors in their giving. But there are several important things development directors cannot do that must be done by the college president or trustee.

Presidents and trustees should do the following:

- Provide the guiding vision for the college or department. What particular niche will this college or department fill in the need for education in the community? What special programs or projects will it conduct, and why are they important?
- Identify what is needed in the way of private funding, and why.
- Set realistic goals for fund-raising.
- Provide the budget and other resources needed to reach the goals.
- Help set a positive, visible image in the community by being active in select community affairs.
- Cultivate strong, positive, personal relationships with top donors and prospects.
- Take an active role in requesting major gifts from select donors.
- Personally provide recognition to major donors to thank them for their gifts and to invite them to remain increasingly active members of the college's family.

The relentless demands of making administrative decisions, dealing with the faculty and responding to the students can easily take up every hour in a day. So, even if a president wants to create a strong fund-raising program, it can seem impossible to get started. Therefore, start gradually. Set some specific project goals with your development director.

Do the projects first that have the best chance for success, no matter what the amount. You do not want failures early in your program. It is too hard to overcome the image of being a questionable donation risk. To announce a successful $1,000 gift to the faculty and friends of the college is better than having to say you fell slightly short of an important $100,000 goal.

If you have a project that is outside the experience of your staff, or if you want to help strengthen the participation of your board or advisors, consultants can be called in temporarily to add important skills and experience. Be sure to agree on goals, costs, and responsibilities before using this, otherwise important fund-raising tool.

Raising money for higher education during this economy with no prior history of building relationships among affluent, loyal supporters is difficult. But it can be done. You simply start where you can build a sturdier program around you as you go. But, the first step is envisioning how the college will grow and improve in meeting the community's educational needs. In that way, the ultimate success of fund-raising at your college is always in the hands of the president and the governing board.

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